

EMTs

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The EMT service in Cohasset is used almost daily, Connolly said, which necessitates as many as three EMTs assigned to each work shift. The calls responded to are equally balanced between illnesses and accidents. Last year 250 people were transported to either the South Shore or Quincy City Hospitals (the only two hospitals where the Cohasset ambulance may transport patients without specific direction from a doctor or hospital).

Connolly stressed that the notion of saving lives via the mad dash to the hospital is not the credo of the EMTs. In fact, the opposite is more the case. "What we basically hope for is to take care of patients at the scene and keep them from getting worse, so that they can return to the community that

much quicker," Connolly said.

Stabilizing the patient from his injuries at the scene is what being an EMT is all about. For instance, Connolly said, a heart attack victim would be calmed, assured of further medical assistance, and possibly administered oxygen. At the scene of an auto accident, EMTs would control bleeding, splint broken bones, and again assure the patient that the hospital would soon be reached.

"The big thing is getting their confidence," Connolly said. As for the saving of lives, Connolly and his men declined to say that EMTs intervention actually staved off the grim reaper, although they indicated that checking severe bleeding, or that comforting patients on the ambulance ride, for instance, were life supporting measures. "But



SHOP TALK — EMTs Thomas Finnegan, left, and Linwood Davis discuss various emergency procedures during a lull in action.

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who are we?" EMT Thomas Finnegan queried. "We're not God, and we're not doctors," he reminded.

An EMT title isn't easy to come by. Eighty-one classroom hours in a hospital program, plus practical training, a CPR course, and a written exam all have to be successfully passed. "It's an ongoing education," Connolly said. "EMTs have to be recertified every two years, and CPR certification has to be renewed every year." Refresher courses, in-service training, number of runs responded to, and attendance to lectures and programs count toward EMT re-certification. Connolly can instruct personnel at the Department in first aid and CPR, as he has an instructor's certification in those areas.

In the past year EMTs have been involved in a number of traumatic incidents — the shootings of the Forest Notch family, the garage door accident that claimed the life of a small child, the nine-year old heart failure victim — all of which have had a tremendous psychological effect on the men. "It takes time for it to go away," Connolly said, once the incident is over, but noted that at the moment of involvement automatic response takes over. "You go home and appreciate your own family more," he said. There is no stress program Connolly knows of for EMTs and he has witnessed EMTs from other towns drop out of the program because they couldn't handle the emotional aftermaths of their work.

"We take pride in doing the job, and I think we have the confidence of the community," Connolly said. This year's Town Meeting appropriated money for more men to take EMT courses in the fall. EMTs receive \$300 a year above their regular salaries. Connolly also stressed the

unpredictable nature of the job. "We never know what the incident will be. We can cover any accident on land, the harbor or the ponds," he said.

The equipment necessary in attending to accidents is found both in the ambulance and the fire engine. Aside from usual firefighting instruments, the engine contains forcible entry tools, such as power saws, air chisels, and the "Jaws of Life," an hydraulic tool that can open any part of an automobile. Cohasset's "Jaws" was bought last year. "We use it more often than we'd like to," Connolly said.

The ambulance keeps a first aid kit up front, for starters, the rest of the vehicle containing sophisticated support equipment. Both a portable and build-in oxygen system are contained in the ambulance. Three compartments within the vehicle hold a pulse meter, blood pressure cuff, equipment for airway related problems, wound dressings and splints.

Although the ambulance may carry drugs prescribed by local doctors, such as morphine, valium and adrenaline, EMTs can't administer any of these. They are kept in case a

doctor is at the scene or rides with a patient to the hospital.

EMTs offer a backup system in the event that something goes wrong. Connolly stressed that when accidents occur, people should provide relevant medical information concerning their illnesses or medications taken, to facilitate care and recovery. He noted the Social Service League's efforts to have the residents at the Housing Authority provide a medical history on the front of their refrigerators.

EMTs in the Fire Department are J. Thomas Baswell, Richard Connolly, Linwood David, Thomas Finnegan, Capt. James Lee Gurry, Paul McCaffigan, Matthew Marr, Arthur Pompeo, James Runey, James Sheerin, Edward Struzik and Mark Trask.

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